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국제학석사학위논문

# Chinese Expansion in Africa: A Field Study on Ethiopian Case

중국의 아프리카 진출 재고:  
에티오피아 현지 사례 연구

2016년 8월

서울대학교 국제대학원  
국제학과 국제지역학 전공  
손 하 운

# Chinese Expansion in Africa: A Field Study on Ethiopian Case

A thesis presented by

**Haun Sohn**

To

Graduate Program in International Area Studies

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Master

In the subject of International Studies

**Graduate School of International Studies**

**Seoul National University**

**Seoul, Republic of Korea**

**August 2016**

**Chinese Expansion in Africa:  
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중국의 아프리카 진출 재고:  
에티오피아 현지 사례 연구

지도교수 조영남

이 논문을 국제학 석사학위논문으로 제출함

2016년 5월

서울대학교 국제대학원

국제학과 국제지역학 전공

손하운

손하운의 국제학 석사학위논문을 인준함

2016년 6월

위원장: 정영록

부위원장: 은기수

위원: 조영남



*(Handwritten signatures in blue ink, including a large signature over the '은기수' line and another over the '조영남' line)*

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The undersigned, appointed by

**Graduate School of International Studies**

**Seoul National University**

Have examined the thesis entitled

**Chinese Expansion in Africa:**

**A Field Study on Ethiopian Case**

Presented by **Haun Sohn**, candidate for the degree of Master of International Studies, and hereby certify that the examined thesis is worthy of acceptance:

Signature



Committee Chair

Cheong, Young-Rok



Signature

Committee Vice Chair

Eun, Ki-Soo



Signature

Committee Member

Cho, Young Nam

June 2016

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## **Abstract**

### **Chinese Expansion in Africa: A Field Study on Ethiopian Case**

Haun Sohn

Graduate School of International Studies

Seoul National University

Chinese expansion in Africa and its rapid growth in 21st century has been one notable topic in international community. Chinese involvements have been continent-wide, and the most of researches argue that through its aggressive diplomatic strategy, China now has won the advantageous position in even expanding more.

Such involvements and influences of China have been studied, evaluated in various aspects and ways. Yet a two-year long local life experience of the author,<sup>1</sup> in a small town of Ethiopia as a Chinese and Amharic<sup>2</sup> speaking Korean, has revealed a distinctive fact.

This article examines how Chinese expansion in Africa and Ethiopia has been done so far, and introduces how that expansion is being conceived by Ethiopian local public. As a result, this article evaluates Chinese strategy on its soft power enhancement as one unsuccessful in African continent.

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1 May 2007~July 2009, Debre Birhan, Semien Shewa, Amhara, Ethiopia

2 Official language of Ethiopia, spoken by 40.3% of population. (2007 Census)

Key words: Chinese expansion in Africa, African sentiment toward China, Chinese soft power in Africa

Student number: 2006-22633



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# **Chapter I. Introduction**

## **1. Research Background**

China has been rapidly developing relationships with African countries in recent years, in a different way from what it used to be. And for the last half of century, China's strategic aim on African continent has been changing distinctively.

Prior to Chinese economic reform, China's strategy in Africa was for gaining African countries' supports for communism ideology proliferation, and now it has transited to one aiding and assisting, for potential opportunities of wealth out of unveiled market and natural resource exploitations.

For the same period of last six decades, developed Western countries' core social values of democratization and human rights have been introduced and pressurized somehow, onto those African countries' regimes. Embracing and enhancing those values had often been preconditions to African countries for obtaining financial and humanitarian aids from Western world.

Very differently from Western way of diplomacy, China these days, based on its non-intervention principle, is significantly spreading out a continent-wide expansion of influence, without threatening African countries' regimes at all. This has been evaluated as a good one since it is anyhow contributing nominal economic development of Africa, but there is obvious criticism of its limit letting democracy and human right issues put aside.

Apart from these well-known macroscopic views on Chinese influence

across the continent, its microscopic observations on Ethiopian local public disclosed interesting differences.

The existing researches did study on public sectors, and the most of those quantitative researches show a clearly favorable attitude of African people toward China and Chinese. But a study result based on the field experience in Ethiopia was very much different from them.

This article, through a two-year long at-site life experience, explains how Chinese strategy is actually influencing people in Ethiopia, and based on that, aims at analyzing its prospect out, and seeks possible better direction of strategy that China should take.

## **2. Literature review**

### **1) Generalized Views and Ethiopian Character**

The existing studies that analyzed Sino-African relationship from the perspective of China's diplomatic strategy, generally see it as natural resource-seeking, and market expanding. Argue that China in order to secure the natural resources, is trafficking in wealth with corrupted regimes, and claim that those free-offers of financial assistances have been its way of resource trafficking.

The discourses on China's natural resource exploitation account for the most among the existing researches, caused by Wests' unease toward growing Chinese influence. However in Ethiopian case, there were almost no natural

resource dealings so far, the story was different.

Chinese expansion in Ethiopia was yet limited in the field of infrastructure construction and telecommunications development (up until year 2009), and these were not the grant type aids either. The characteristics of these businesses are not short-term trading, but rather businesses that can only be profitable in terms of relatively long-term investments, so some Western critics' argument of Chinese presence having harmful effect to African immature markets in the course of resource and market seeking is not quite applicable to Ethiopian case.

As for the criticism of trafficking with corrupted regimes, it is not completely applicable to Ethiopia either, since the Meles Zenawi government from 1991 – actually had been a dictatorship – with remarkable economic growth in recent years, had little social discords and it had been pro-West.

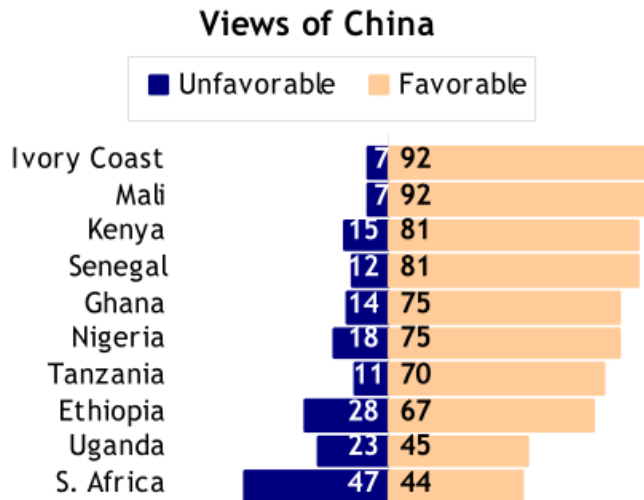
Thus a completely differentiated view seemed to be necessary in studying Ethiopian case.

## 2) Existing Studies on Public Sector

The quantitative researches on public sector show significantly positive sentiments of most African countries towards Chinese involvement across the continent.<sup>3</sup> However, through the field experience in Ethiopian rural town, it could be observed that there was much worse sentiment of Ethiopian people toward China and Chinese.

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<sup>3</sup> Sautman, B. and Yan, H., "African Perspectives on China-Africa Links" *The China Quarterly*, Vol. 199 (September 2009), pp. 728-759.



Quantitative researches assess; China's increasing economic impact in Africa is starkly visible in the eyes of those publics. China is seen as having a large and growing influence in Africa, and for the most part its influence is viewed positively.<sup>4</sup>

This article suspects that the poll sampling has been the critical reason of significant gap in between the study results. Undoubtedly, the poll samples in Ethiopia for interviews must have been people who were able to read (literally) the questionnaires, and who were able to answer the questions with respect to the recent international affairs. This highly likely had lead poll samples to treat the poll and Chinese influence politically and economically, with the positive statistical figures of economic growth and other educational knowledge taken into considerations. Moreover, in Ethiopia, a serious shortage of accessible mass media should have made the results of

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<sup>4</sup> Pew Research Center, "Global Unease with Major World Powers" *The Pew Global Attitudes Project*, June 27, 2007, pp. 39-46.

quantitative researches distorted.

This article introduces Ethiopian local public's primitive sentiment, of those illiterates included, and the economic statistics or the trend of international affairs put aside. Describes a real inside-the-community experiences. As to Ethiopian sentiment, Chapter III will explain in detail.

Another notable argument regarding to the public sentiment is about the threat to African countries' manufacturing sector caused by Chinese presence in the continent. They argue that huge growth of import from China and intense competitions caused by increasing Chinese production bases in Africa had led weak African manufacturing sectors affected negatively in terms of job losses and failures of small and medium size businesses. And argue that this had affected public sentiment toward Chinese involvement being negative.

However, Ethiopia as a country that has been mostly relying on agricultural economy with little industrial manufacturing base, the effect did not seem significant. Moreover, aforementioned quantitative researches show most of positive results of Ethiopians in contrary.

In summary, this article introduces an unprecedented argument of African public's sentiment toward China that had been learned from a local life experience, in comparison to those favorable results from most of existing researches on Sino-African relationships.

### 3) Research Method

A qualitative field study based on the experience out of inhabitation had been conducted mainly in a city of Debre Birhan, Semien (northern) Shewa,

Zone, Amhara Region, Ethiopia, by the author as a Korean overseas volunteer worked at Semien Shewa Zonal Education Bureau for educational development program dispatched by Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA, a government-run ODA organization) from May 2007 to July 2009. The author was specifically assigned for curriculum / environmental development in the field of physical education, and also had taught at Debre Birhan Teacher Education and Vocational Training College (a three-year course national college of education), and Tebassie-Medhanielem Primary School (an eight-year course elementary – compulsory) as a special instructor.

Debre Birhan is a small town with widely scattered 80,000 some populations in administrative area (back in 2009), located at 130km point northeast of capital city of Addis Ababa, it is also a zonal capital of Semien Shewa Zone.

In this town since September 2007, Sinohydro Corporation's (中国水电) construction base camp had been located with over 80 Chinese residents for road widening construction project. During the same period, China Road & Bridge Corporation (中国路桥, CRBC) was doing road construction in southern section of construction area too, so local people in this area could experience the most frequent in-person exposures to Chinese.

This could very much attenuate the serious lack of public media's informative influence to the local public.

Foreign residents in the town except Chinese had been less than ten total over the period of field study, and they were mostly there for developmental programs by VSO (Voluntary Service Overseas), GTZ (Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit, German Technical Cooperation), JICA (Japan

International Cooperation Agency), and various UN agencies (mostly for short-term visits).

The author as a locally well-known foreigner in the area, the in-person experiences and the interview samples were abundant and widely various, from least-income agricultural labors around the neighborhood, to wealthiest and renowned high rank officials.



## **Chapter II. China's Diplomatic Strategy Toward Africa**

### **1. Transition of Chinese Strategy**

From the establishment of People's Republic of China in 1949, up until the economic reform, especially during the 1960s to be exact, Chinese strategy can be summarized as 'export of revolution'.

China claimed itself as confronting Western hegemonism, colonialism, imperialism and revisionism, labeled itself as a front-line representative of the third world countries, had contrived to win African countries over to China's party during 1960s.

However, this export-oriented diplomatic strategy had turned out to be an unexpected, unintended influence on power structures in many of those African regimes, and had led the relationships weakened between China and them. This was not in line with Chinese non-interference principle either, China's strategy then transited to one 'free and unconditional' during the 1970s, and China as a result could regain the relationship gradually.<sup>5</sup>

In this period, China's grant aid toward Africa had reached 4 billion RMB, (and this had marked near 10% amount of the First Five-Year Plan's total budget for infrastructure improvement of 42 billion RMB),<sup>6</sup> and the

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<sup>5</sup> Li, Anshan, "China and Africa: Policy and Challenges" *China Security*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (Summer 2007), pp. 69-93.

<sup>6</sup> 杨丽琼, "外交档案解密:1950年代新中国对外援助逾40亿元" 『新民晚报』 2006年 7月 29日.

grant aid toward Africa marked 4.5% of its whole national expenditure in 1967, 6.7% in 1972, and 7.2% in 1973.<sup>7</sup> This strategic aid had let China gain supports from third world countries, and those supports had been a key factor for China becoming a permanent member of the UN Security Council in 1971.

If we say China's strategy toward Africa prior to the economic reform as one 'splitting friend-and-foe', then after the economic reform, China has changed its strategy to one more commercialized and diversified.

In the 12th CPC Central Committee in 1982, this strategic change has been made official, from one emphasizing 'war and revolution', to one for 'peace and development', at the same time, its core diplomatic principle has been changed from 'economy serves diplomacy' to 'diplomacy serves economy'. (Li, 2007)

During the 1980s, the importance of third world countries to China has been diminished due to China's concentration on economic development and its non-alignment principle. At the same time, the importance of China itself to those third world countries has been decreased too, due to the lessened tension out of cold war. However, because of the continuously raised human rights issues especially after Tiananmen protests in 1989, the atmosphere of international community got worse toward China, so China from then, re-started making efforts to strengthen the relationship with the third world countries again.

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<sup>7</sup> 张效民, “中国和平外交战略视野中的对外援助” 『国际论坛』 (2008) 第3期, pp. 38-43.

## 2. Value of Africa to China

Now China sees Africa as its one large strategic value. Cause in order for China to become a great power, 1) economic development, and 2) leverage in international politics, are two core necessary capabilities. African continent is one with huge potential that can provide China these core capabilities.<sup>8</sup>

Firstly, in economy-wise, the natural resource of African continent is a critical factor to China's sustainable economic development, and a huge unexploited potential market can be a breakthrough for China's saturated domestic market situation. This is the main reason why China is now driving aggressive natural resource diplomacy in sub-Saharan Africa, and pioneering various potential markets for Chinese industrial products, and offering great amount of grant aid for all these.

Secondly in politics-wise, African countries are still important to China in terms of securing political supports for enhancement of China's political leverage in international community. To achieve this, China in addition to huge amount of physical aid, opposes Western way of aid which imposes Western values such as democracy, freedom and human rights to African countries. This distinctive stance of China has been widely supported by many of African regimes, helped China in gaining supports for its international leverage.

These are why China is driving its diplomacy aggressively across the whole continent, in almost all fields of trade, investment, aid, personal

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<sup>8</sup> 김애경, “중국의 아프리카대륙 전략적 가치 재발견” 『국제정치논총』 제 49집 1호 (한국국제정치학회, 2009), p. 175.

visitations and establishing multilateral forums.

From 2000 to 2011, the trade scale in between China and Africa increased from 10 billion USD to 120 billion USD, and Chinese industrial products' market share in Africa increased from 3% to 14%. And the portion of China's oil imports from Africa out of total oil import was about 11% in 1995, increased to 23% in 2010, and expected to increase up to 45% in 2025.<sup>9</sup> The white paper on Chinese foreign aid shows that China's total ODA worldwide had reached 40 billion USD up until 2009, and 45.7% amount of that had been to African continent.<sup>10</sup>

### **3. How China Differs from West**

#### **1) Criticism of Chinese Influence**

China's principle of non-intervention has been a key factor in the debates of Western criticism. Critics point out that China is conniving at Africa's authoritarian regimes and neglecting their problems of democracy and human rights. They criticize that China is trafficking in wealth with corruption and dictatorship for their right for natural resource exploitation across the continent. This is the most distinctive factor of Chinese way of influence from Western ways that tried hard to enhance those African countries' democracy

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<sup>9</sup> 박영호, “중국의 아프리카 진출 가속화 동향 및 시사점” 『KIEP 지역경제 포커스』 Vol. 5 No. 37 (대외경제정책연구원, 2011), pp. 4-8.

<sup>10</sup> 『中国的对外援助(2011)』 白皮书.

and human rights for the whole last half of century.

This might sound very persuasive from the perspective of Western values, but still, to most of African countries, China as a country achieved unprecedented economic development under non-democratic regime, is one considerable, attractive model. And this fact somehow empowers Chinese way of expansion in the continent.

Critics claim that China's expansion in the continent is solely for natural resources. Argue that China's various ways of support, aid and all the activities are to make their greed for natural resources behind the veil of reciprocity. However, this can only be discounted as Western countries' grumbler, while the history of Western countries' natural resource exploitation has been much longer and harsher. China seemed to be not being pressurized at all by this criticism.

Actually, the point West criticizes is true though. From 2000s, Beijing has officially set up two agenda with respect to the strategy toward African continent, of which introduced; 1) natural resources' supply for China's sustainable economic development, and 2) development of new market for Chinese industrial products.<sup>11</sup>

## 2) Positive Aspects of Chinese Influence

From another side of view, many researches assess the Chinese influence positively, in terms of current win-win circumstances across the continent.

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<sup>11</sup> 김동환, 오병석, “중국의 대(對) 아프리카 경제정책 변화: 냉전과 탈냉전의 비교를 중심으로” 『국제지역연구』 제14권 제2호 (국제지역학회, 2010), p. 313.

Like a title of Michal Meidan's article "Business Now, Politics Later" says, China's strategy based on the non-intervention principle clearly has its positive influence in economic aspects, while the ultimate values of democracy and human rights seem to be far-off to those underdeveloped African countries.

In other words, many of African countries' problems such as dictatorships and human rights are still problems, but these problems have been there for the last half of century, and the Western way has somehow failed to solve that problems. The proponents of Chinese way of expansion point out that simply, there were two problems of economy and politics in Africa, and the West failed in solving both problems during the last half of century, but China at least seems to be improving one big part of the problems recently, the economy. Moreover, the proponents of Chinese influence emphasize that this positive effect is one reciprocal in between China and Africa, and that is one of the most important factors in international development assistance.

On the other hand, the experience of rapid economic development of China as a developing, third world country, and the African countries' expectations of the opportunities for experience-sharing – so called the Beijing Consensus – have been another notable factor that enhances the charm of Chinese way of expansion in Africa.

## **Chapter III. Ethiopian Case**

Former Chinese president Hu, Jintao in 2007 had officially told the 17th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party that China should invest more to improve its soft power.<sup>12</sup> And president Xi, Jinping repeated the very same in 2014 too.

There are 46 Confucius Institutes and 23 Confucius Classrooms in 36 countries of Africa (2014). The Confucius Institute as a symbolic cultural attracting strategy for soft power enhancement, is now being expanded rapidly across the continent.

There is no doubt that China is driving its strategy in the way of improving its soft power in Africa, and yet few of existing studies have evaluated this strategy or its involvement in the continent as one negative in terms of soft power improvement.

Throughout the field study it could be observed that, what is happening in Ethiopia and the public sentiment of Ethiopian toward China could cast China's effort in the shade.

### **1. China in Ethiopia**

Chinese involvement in Ethiopia was mostly comprised of infrastructure construction and communication technology (up to 2009). Like many other

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<sup>12</sup> Nye, Joseph S., "Why China Is Weak on Soft Power" *International Herald Tribune*, January 17, 2012.

countries in sub-Saharan Africa, the proportion of paved road is very low in Ethiopia and paved roads were very much time-worn, mostly were constructed during 1950~1960s, by Italian involvement. Ethiopia has one of the lowest road densities in the continent, and its economic development has been held back by this large road infrastructure gap.

The World Bank project of ‘Road Sector Development Project’ had set the road reconstruction as one of the key tasks for Ethiopia’s poverty eradication, the World Bank has invested over 2 billion USD to Ethiopia since 1991.<sup>13</sup>

Ever since the enforcement of the Road Sector Development Program, road widening and reconstructions have become countrywide businesses. And in the past decade, Chinese state owned enterprises have been the most competitive tenderers for those projects countrywide.

Korea’s Keangnam Enterprises Co., Ltd. (경남기업) and Japan’s Kajima Corporation (鹿島建設) have also been ones of main actors in Ethiopia’s road projects, but it’s been told that Chinese were having much larger market share and it was still increasing (as of 2009).

In the field of telecommunication technology, ZTE Corporation (中兴通讯) and Huawei Technologies Co., Ltd. (华为技术) have been two remarkable players. They have aggressively entered the world’s most lagging-behind telecommunication environment of Ethiopia and had won success while all of the world’s leading telecommunication companies see Ethiopian telecommunication infrastructure as helpless and unmarketable.

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<sup>13</sup> World Bank, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/ethiopia/overview#3> (Access date: 2016.4.15)



Huawei and ZTE were the pioneers in the market. They have successfully introduced and developed 3G mobile network service in 2008 and have dominated the mobile network services in Ethiopia since then. (In 2013, Ethio Telecom has signed a 1.6 billion USD deal for 4G LTE service only with Huawei and ZTE as well.)<sup>14</sup>

Chinese involvement in Ethiopia is mainly composed of profit making activities, – Chinese government’s support of financing has been one of key factors as a matter of course though – and this has been one of the distinctive factors of Chinese involvement in Ethiopia from many other sub-Saharan African countries, where Chinese involvements of infrastructure constructions were mostly for the actual purpose of winning the mining rights and oil concessions. China in Ethiopia was directly making profits from business activity itself.

## **2. Chinese to Ethiopian – Strange Stereotypes**

Simply in summary, unlike the results of quantitative researches, Ethiopian people’s sentiment toward China and Chinese people is very negative. This is very strange having the fact of very little influence of mass media taken into considerations, and very strange that they have clearly more negative sentiment toward China than toward much nearer countries of Sudan, Kenya and Somalia.

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<sup>14</sup> Telecoms.com, “Ethiopia signs \$1.6bn LTE deal with ZTE, Huawei” 2013.8.19, <http://telecoms.com/172162/ethiopia-signs-800m-lte-deal-with-zte/> (Access date: 2016.4.15)

In most of conversations with local Ethiopians, China, Chinese and almost everything related China were regarded as something bad, compared to most of other countries.

On the streets of Ethiopia, local people express big interests to those Asian people, and actively – from the perspective of Korean – try to greet or talk. Usually shouting a word “China!” is the most common action when they see an Asian-looking stranger. It is not in very friendly manner (again, from the perspective of Korean), so many foreigners actually feel uncomfortable with this, while they are also similarly being shouted by a word of “Ferenji!” (means bright-skinned foreigner). Relatively in rare cases, just like above, Asians can hear “Japan!” as well.

For a typical example, greetings like; “Japan! Hey Japan! Hello, you must be Japanese, because you are handsome.” have been made couple of times to the author by local strangers on the streets. Right after my response of clarification as not being a Japanese, Ethiopians do not conceal their disappointment and immediately response; “Oh, we don’t like Chinese.” and turn their backs on me. With my additional correction as a South Korean, their attitudes completely change again, to one friendly. (Reactions and attitudes towards Japanese and Koreans were never bad, strangely.)

To my questions of asking why they dislike Chinese, Ethiopians’ answers were always naïveté and reason-lacking, like “Chinese are not as good-looking as Japanese”, and “Chinese are poor than Japanese”. Considering the fact that their face-to-face experiences were very much scant with either of Chinese and Japanese, this could only be understood as a symbolic stereotype of China that Ethiopians had.

The answers of Ethiopians to the question of ‘Why dislike Chinese?’ were vague after all. Except a very few people who were relatively well educated in Addis Ababa, none of Ethiopians was referring to any of China’s historical facts, or factors that have been introduced by mass media, or anything related to Sino-African relationships. But many Ethiopians clearly argue like; “We know Chinese eat everything, we don’t even eat pork by Christian law (Ethiopian Orthodox), but they eat dogs, horses, even donkeys. That is very barbarous.”

Even putting the degree of maturity in understanding cultural difference aside, and considering the fact of these animals being eaten in several other countries worldwide, strong aversion toward China seemed unfair but it was in fact everywhere in Ethiopia, very oddly.

Throughout my residential period, it could be observed everywhere that there were clearly negative sentiments towards the image of China itself with no adequate reasons. A strong stereotype was making almost all the contents and things related to China being considered as something bad.

### **3. Chinese to Ethiopian – Empirical Repulsion**

Ethiopians' public sentiments towards Chinese were worsening through their experiences with actual Chinese presence, based on aforementioned strange negative stereotype underlying.

At the beginning of my habitation in Ethiopia, I personally had difficulties in adapting myself to Ethiopian style greetings (shoutings) on the streets such as “China!”, “You!”, since it really did not sound friendly (most of foreigners complained the same). – Ethiopian people however, normally never mean to offend. – And I had chances to discuss this matter with many Ethiopians. Here is a good example of comparison from an Ethiopian, between Japanese / Westerners and Chinese.

I know Ethiopians' street shouting to foreign strangers is considered as rudeness by most of foreigners. We admit this is due to the lack of education, and educated Ethiopians are aware of foreigners' frustrations and troubles in communications thereafter. But funnily, Chinese people do not complain about the street shouting, and they do not usually get frustrated in communications with Ethiopians. This is mainly because Chinese are equally rude, so they do not take that as rudeness. This is the same logic of that Ethiopians are well communicating among ourselves. But like you and Westerners and Japanese, they get frustrated and complain. This is because they are well educated, differently from Chinese and Ethiopian. This is a well-known story in Ethiopia.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> A director of Tebassie-Medhanialem Primary School, Debre Birhan. 2008.

Apart from its matter of true or false, apart from its problem of generalization, and putting the matter of how to define the rudeness aside, Ethiopian sentiment toward China compared to Japan and West could easily be seen from this dialogue.

A road reconstruction project was ongoing during this field study, on the road from Addis Ababa to Mekelle, a regional capital of Tigray Region (full length 761km, most part of no. 2 national highway), and the whole section from Addis Ababa to Debre Birhan was under construction by Sinohydro and China Road & Bridge for about whole two years of my residence period.

People in Debre Birhan were complaining about road construction; “Chinese have ruined our entire town! We are breathing in dust every day and walking down the street has been a big trouble!”

The city was typically formed along with no. 2 national highway, – paved in 1960s – and some discomfort was inevitable in re-constructing the only main road of the town. However, people were complaining strongly anyway.

Foreigners in Ethiopia especially in rural areas, are usually considered by Ethiopians as people for international development assistance (cause most of them actually are). So the local sentiment toward them is generally very friendly. But even though few people in Debre Birhan were aware of that Sinohydro and CRBC were there to do their business not for grant aid, nevertheless people’s sentiments were just that bad.

In Bole, one of the wealthiest districts of Addis Ababa, there is well paved 6 lane road donated by Chinese government in 2006 named Ethio-China Friendship Road. On this road, there was a section floods frequently

during the rainy season. Every time when it floods, people complained strongly. Although it was apparent that the flood was caused by garbage and mud on the street that stopping up the road drainages, not by the quality of road construction itself, but people just complain; “Everything that Chinese made, is unusable!” One guy on the bus said to me; “If you were a Chinese, I would have remained silent.” showing a friendly but discriminative manner to a stranger from Korea. It was not difficult to imagine how Ethiopians would have reacted to the road flood if the road were constructed by Western countries.

As to the telecommunications, it is a fact that there was a remarkable contribution of Chinese enterprises in improving Ethiopia’s wireless network infrastructure, and that was a thing that has never been achieved by any of Western IT enterprises until Chinese enterprises’ aggressive market attack.

This remarkable improvement in telecommunications could have been an important factor that could positively affect Ethiopians’ sentiments toward China. However, the contribution did not seem to have made China’s image being high in Ethiopian’s favor. Complaints like; “The network doesn’t work well!”, “Chinese electronic products are all bad.” were everywhere in Addis Ababa, nevertheless the 3G mobile network actually did not even exist before Chinese involvement.

It could be observed that, when the strong negative stereotype meets its actual influence to the public’s lives, the public sentiment was only getting worse nearly no matter what kind of influence it was.

#### **4. Ethiopian to Chinese and Others**

The observable behavior pattern of Chinese residents toward local Ethiopians was another factor in forming the local public sentiment.

The majority of Chinese population in Ethiopia was who engaged in road construction businesses. This has been a factor of China's distinctiveness from other foreign residents who are mostly engaged in the international developmental programs.

Chinese who reside in road construction camps were the management manpower. And their in-person attitudes towards Ethiopian local labor employees were not very friendly. The most of local employees were hired for manual labor and their wages were not different from the amount they get when they do the same job with local enterprises, which was equally about 10 Ethiopian Birr per day for ordinary manual labor (2008).

It's been said that the labor productivity of Ethiopian people is low, – leaving the matter of wage-productivity ratio out of the question – and Chinese managements were always under pressure of project progress. So Chinese always complain; “Ethiopians are very lazy, I think they are born lazy. That's why they are still this poor.” and Ethiopian labors complain; “Chinese are harsh. They do not want to pay more and only want us to work more and more.” In this situation, abusive languages and even assaults were often observed. “Ethiopians are pathetic and helpless, always try to take shortcuts. If I don't show them an angry look, they will only try more and more to find a way they can hide from the works.” Some Chinese construction site overseers complained.

The towns and villages are formed along with the highways, and the highways as those towns' only main roads, the numbers of bypassing people are huge. And those violent affairs were seen by many other Ethiopian residents. There is no doubt that Chinese employers' behavior has negatively affected the local sentiment.



Chinese construction trucks rising dusts in Debre Birhan; The towns-penetrating highway is normally the only main road of rural towns. © Haun Sohn, March 2009

Considering how Chinese say about Ethiopian people, it is not difficult to imagine that Chinese too, clearly have attitudes of treating Ethiopian people with disdain. And that attitude was even worsening as their experiences with Ethiopian people being accumulated. At the same time, Ethiopians' sentiments



were worsening too, by daily exposures to what was happening at the construction sites.

Additionally, Ethiopians' discriminative attitude toward Chinese and Westerners was one of the factors that worsens public Ethio-China relationships. While the West-supremacy is a worldwide notion, it is much easily observed in developing countries. And Ethiopia was clearly not an exception.

There were many difficulties as a Korean volunteer in dealing developmental projects with Ethiopian local public administrations. Most of foreigners including Westerners complained the same. Here is a good example explained by a well local-experienced German resident.

I am a German, so no Ethiopians can raise voice at me. This is partially because I'm a German who is from a country that grants enormous amount of aids to Ethiopia. But, actually, it is because I'm a white man, sadly. I know you are a Korean, and I somewhat understand the differences in between you and Chinese and Japanese, but Ethiopians don't. They think you are from China and that is why you are always in troubles with public authorities and rude people on the streets.<sup>16</sup>

Even a German resident could notice Ethiopians' discriminative attitudes with respect to the recent Chinese involvement in the country. Although he was very rude to Ethiopians – from the perspective of Korean – and did not

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<sup>16</sup> A German civil engineering professional from GTZ (Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit, German Technical Cooperation) at Debre Birhan TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training) College. 2008.

even hesitate to speak out racist statements to local people, but he still could exert powers everywhere as a Westerner and had even been respected in local community. Here is another example from a British resident;

I somehow could learn how Ethiopians regard Chinese, Japanese and Westerners, and recently Korean too. Please do not feel bad about it, discriminations are everywhere in the world, since it is a human nature. As to how to appropriately control that human nature is the matter of education.<sup>17</sup>

This dialogue also shows that, it had been observed that how difficult a soft power enhancing strategy driven by country level is, in actual improvement of public sentiments. The distinctive local public sentiments toward China, Japan and West were already there and seemed to be very firm.

## **5. Cause and Limit of Ethiopian Sentiment**

This is a fundamental question. An obvious discriminative sentiment toward China seemed to be formed long before the recent Chinese involvement in the country, even the influence of mass media was very scant. And Chinese activities observed seemed to be only worsening that local sentiment.

That negative stereotype was something could not easily be analyzed

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<sup>17</sup> A British IT professional from VSO (Voluntary Service Overseas) at Debre Birhan Teacher Education and Vocational Training College. 2008.

while we do not have any clue from any of notable historical background or issues in their bilateral relationship. And moreover, none of Ethiopians themselves could give a clear answer to the reason why either.

This field study could only conjecture its main reason from Chinese industrial products. There was a massive inflow of Chinese products across the continent as well as in Ethiopia, and Chinese product with its price competitiveness, has dominated the market. This has contributed greatly, in making images of Chinese products not only as price competitive, but also as a pronoun of inferior quality. Ethiopian's most exposure to the contents of China is undoubtedly the Chinese industrial products. And people say;

Products made in China are always poor. They are just incomparable with Japanese and Western products. / China might claim they supply low price products and that could improve our purchasing power, but all of these Chinese products are not usable for as longer as Japanese and Western products. We are actually the victims of inferior quality, because we have to buy the same product again every time when Chinese product breaks down. China is only self-serving through product exports to us, poor countries.<sup>18</sup>

A negative stereotype was there, and the recent Chinese involvements in the country did not seem to be improving that stereotype. As described, the Chinese involvements were actually worsening that stereotype.

In addition, eventually, a wide and nicely paved road reconstruction has

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<sup>18</sup> Villagers in Debre Birhan / Students at Debre Birhan Teacher Education and Vocational Training College. 2008.

been finished in and around the area of Debre Birhan in 2009. I visited the town again in 2014 expecting an improved local sentiment toward big Chinese contribution, but their responses were only lukewarm. None of local people seemed to be enthusiastic about striking improvement in road conditions. Some villagers did not even remember that was done by Chinese, and some were still referring to the uncomfortable days during the construction years ago. It could be observed that the negative local sentiment was still there unchanged.

The reason might be that their lifestyle was still very much in walking distances, not yet on personal vehicles age, so road improvement did not affect the local people's life much. And also, this can be interpreted that the international assistance on the infrastructure development is not much affecting the local public's sentiment positively.

## Chapter IV. Conclusion

If we see Chinese involvements in Africa as a part of soft power improvement strategy, in Ethiopia, as described, Chinese expansion is not affecting its soft power positively.

Chinese residents in Ethiopia usually self-praise that China and Ethiopia are mutually winning. That China is contributing a lot in developmental assistance to Ethiopia, and at the same time China could also find its own new market out of saturated domestic economy. It seems true, unlike many other countries across sub-Saharan Africa, China could create short-term profit directly from their activities somehow in parallel with contributions to Ethiopia's national development.

However, from the perspective of soft power, its prospect looks gloomy. Strong negative sentiment seemed to be unchanging, even in the areas with visible well-done Chinese contributions. Moreover, it is hard to imagine that this stereotype of China can be changed drastically by any means.

Albeit superficially, during the period of this field study, the words from my colleagues of KOICA volunteer program dispatched to Tanzania, Rwanda, Senegal, Egypt and Tunis could be referred. And their information about the local public's sentiment toward Chinese in each country, not strangely, was mostly similar with Ethiopian case.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> The 34th batch (Spring 2007) of KOICA overseas volunteer program had dispatched three to five volunteers to six African countries including Ethiopia. Total numbers of KOICA volunteers in eleven African countries counted 399 (as of 2010.8.31). The fields of activities were widely various; IT, electronics, mechanics, architecture, civil engineering, automotive, Taekwondo, physical education, medicine, nursing, dietetics, veterinary science, farming, fishery, textile, social welfare, adolescent education and etc. (<http://kov.koica.go.kr>, Access date: 2016.5.8)

Will those Confucius Institutes and Confucius Classrooms be able to improve China's soft power in the continent? It has a bare possibility either. China and Africa hardly share their values and emotions, since people in Africa hardly have appreciation of the cultural, historical background of China.

And the charm of modern China, is still incomparable with the West who have been exerting dominant influences over the century in the whole continent. The perceptions about the soft powers of West and China, to people those whom I met in Ethiopia, was one already formed stiff and did not seem to be one that could change easily.

After all, Ethiopian sentiment toward China observed from the field experience, was one clearly different from existing studies. The main reason of that difference seemed to be the poll samplings of existing studies, and the main reason of that negative sentiment itself seemed to be the industrial products from China. As to the root cause of Ethiopians' strong negative stereotype of China, further anthropological / sociological study seemed to be necessary.

China's problems observed from local microscopic studies, does not seem to be the phenomenon that can easily be improved. But not only because of China's strategic need aforementioned, Africa still is one critical factor in Chinese diplomacy in achieving China's goal of being the great power. This is why China should continue its expansion aggressively and this is why there had been no significant changes in the strategy in recent years, despite of the existence of the microscopic problems and Western criticisms.

There is no doubt that China must keep the aggressive expansion in the

continent for its own good. So the findings of this article can be said meaningless in terms of Beijing's decision makings on its diplomatic strategy, since Beijing cannot actually afford thinking alternative to current strategies with those microscopic problems taken into considerations.

Thus in long term perspective, for China to be a great power, China should never stop improving its own domestic problems, and make good preparations for the change in domestic industrial structures from labor intensive to technology intensive.

African public's negative stereotypes will only be changed after Chinese industrial products gain their reputation as quality goods out of superior workmanships. And China's soft power in Africa will only enhanced when China becomes mature society.

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## 국문초록

### 중국의 아프리카 진출 재고: 에티오피아 현지 사례 연구

서울대학교 국제대학원  
손하운

중국의 아프리카 진출과 그 급속한 성장세는 21세기 국제사회에서의 중요 화제가 되었다. 중국의 아프리카 진출은 대륙 전역에 걸쳐 있으며, 그 동안의 공격적 외교전략을 통해 향후의 영향력 확장에 있어서도 유리한 고지를 선점한 것으로 평가된다.

이러한 중국의 아프리카 진출은 다양한 방면에서 연구되었으나, 저자가 중국어와 암하라어를 구사하는 제 3국인으로서, 에티오피아 현지의 작은 마을에서 2년간 생활하며 파악한 민간의 對中 정서는 기존 연구들이 논한 내용과는 확연히 다른 양상이었다.

본 논문은 당해 에티오피아 민간의 대중 정서와, 중국의 아프리카 및 에티오피아 진출 현황을 비교 분석하고, 이에 견주어 중국의 소프트 파워 전략에 대한 아프리카에서의 성과를 부정적으로 평가하며, 이에 따른 중국의 전략이 취해야 할 방향을 탐구한다.

주요어: 중국의 아프리카 진출, 아프리카의 대중국 정서, 아프리카에서의 중국의 소프트 파워

학번: 2006-22633